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THE
SUFFICIENCY
AND *Bible Appendix*
PERFECTION
OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURES,
As a RULE of
Faith and Manners.

SAMUEL SAVAGE.
of Edinorton



L O N D O N.

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SUFFICIENCY

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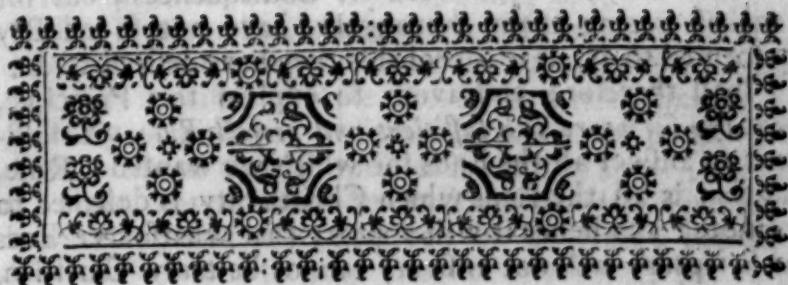
FOR SCULPTURES



SAMUEL J. IVES



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The Sufficiency and Perfection of the Holy Scriptures, &c.



HERE is nothing more readily and more universally allowed by Protestants, than that *the Holy Scriptures are a perfect Rule of Faith and Manners*. By this Weapon they have often vanquished their Popish Adversaries; and therefore have greatly triumphed in it: but in Disputes among themselves, have been either afraid or ashamed to produce it; or else have so unskillfully managed it, as to wound the very Cause they have designed to defend by it.

If Protestants don't maintain their Ground by this Boundary, they know the Papists would soon over-run them; and yet they have frequently endeavoured to gain Ground one of another, by leaping over it.

Some Persons have thought it a good Argument to attack others with, but not at all fit to be brought against themselves; and tho it cuts deep into their Adversaries Cause, yet loses its edge when turned against themselves.

Others have used it, but with some secret Reserves; and tho they have acknowledg'd the Scripture to be a perfect Rule, yet have saved room for some darling Opinions; which they think as important as Scripture itself, because *certainly* contained in it; or because they think the Scripture almost useless and insignificant without them.

Some indeed have adhered to this *Protestant Principle* as far as they have perceived its Consequences; but for want of tracing them thoroughly, have not so exactly conformed to it, as it is probable they have desired to do.

I shall therefore endeavour to explain this Principle, That *the Scripture is a sufficient and perfect Rule*, viz. sufficient to answer all the Ends for which we wanted a Rule, and that is all the Ends which Christianity is designed to promote: and hence it will appear, that whatsoever Ends the Scripture will not answer, cannot be truly Christian. And, to be as clear as possible, I shall consider the matter under these Four Heads.

I. How the Scripture is a Rule.

II. For what it is a Rule, and to what Ends it is given.

III. Shew that it is sufficient to accomplish those Ends.

IV. Make some Corollaries.

I. Let us consider how the Scripture is a Rule. And in a strict and proper Sense, a Rule is a Measure, whereby we try material things, in order to judge of some Qualities which are to be determined to belong to those things, or to be wanting, according as they agree or disagree to their Rule: and so in a figurative Sense, the Scripture is a Measure, whereby we are to try and judge of all those things concerning which God has revealed his Mind and Will to us; and are bound to believe things true or false, worthy to be received or to be rejected, just as they agree or disagree with the Scripture. And herein I can't do my Reader a greater Pleasure, than by transcribing the Words of the excellent Dr. Tillotson: " A Rule (*says he*) when we speak of a Rule of Faith, is a metaphorical Word, which in its first and proper Sense, being applied to material and sensible things, is a Measure, according to which we judge of the straitness and crookedness of things: and hence it is transfer'd by Analogy to things moral and intellectual. A moral Rule is the Measure according to which we judge whether a thing be good or evil ...and the Agreement or Disagreement of our Actions to this Rule, is suitably to the Metaphor called Rectitude, or Obliquity. An intellectual Rule is the Measure according to which we judge whether a thing be true or false. So that the general Notion of a Rule is, that it is a Measure, by the Agreement or Dis-
agree-

“ agreement to which we judge of all things of that kind
 “ to which it belongs. *Rule of Faith, §. 1.*”

This Notion of a Rule is very clear, and can hardly be disputed. But it may be added for the present purpose, that it is requisite a Rule should be a thing fixed and agreed upon, and that it should be plain and certain; because, without these Properties it can't be known and used as a Rule, nor in its use be exact and perfect. That which is wavering and uncertain, can be no Rule; because it does not help one to judge truly of any thing, but rather draws one into a wrong Judgment, or at least leaves one to Doubts and Uncertainties, which a Rule is designed to prevent and put an end unto.

“ A Rule of Faith (*says this great Man*) is the Measure
 “ according to which we judge what matters we are to
 “ assent to, as revealed to us by God, and what not. And
 “ more particularly, the Rule of Christian Faith is the
 “ Measure according to which we are to judge what we
 “ ought to assent to, as the Doctrine revealed by Christ
 “ to the World, and what not. *Ibid.*”

The Scripture is such a Rule of Faith; and besides, it is a *Rule of Manners*: for it not only determines what we are to believe, but also what we are to do, and that in all things of a religious nature. And as a Rule, it has these Properties:

1. It is fixed and settled for this purpose. The Authority of God has made it the Measure and Standard according to which Men ought to judge of his Mind and Will, as far as he has made it known. Our Consent, which does in some cases determine and settle what shall be a Rule, cannot be necessary here; because God has an absolute right over us: and if we acknowledge that he has revealed himself to us, and that the Scriptures are his Word, we are bound to receive every thing contained therein as true, and just, and right, because of the Veracity and Goodness of God, which make it impossible that he should impose upon his Creatures. No Man therefore is left to his own Discretion, to receive the Scripture as a Rule, or not; and to make use of it as such: because God, our absolute Sovereign, has determin'd it to be so, none other being capable of searching into his Mind, and making it known to us. *No Man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the Bosom of the Father, he has declared him; John 1. 18.*

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2. The Scripture as a Rule, is plain and intelligible: and indeed, it can be a Rule no farther than it is so. What is not to be understood, can't be proposed as a Rule by a good and merciful God, who never requires impossible things; neither can be received or made use of by us as a Rule, because it can't help us to judge of any thing. And since the Scripture is made a Rule for all, for Persons of weak as well as of strong Capacities, for the Learned and Unlearned too, it must of necessity be plain. And because it is given to direct us in religious Matters only, which are to be performed with clear Understanding and full Consent, this also confirms the Plainness and Clearness of Scripture; upon which account it is compared to a *Light that shineth in a dark place*, 2 Pet. 1. 19.

3. The Scripture as a Rule is also certain and decisive; for it is given us by God, who cannot lye, and whose Words are all true in the utmost exactness. Therefore the Scripture, in its primitive Simplicity, and in the condition wherein it was delivered by God, contains as much absolute Certainty, as any Mathematical Measure can do: And in its present Condition, has as much Certainty as is requisite to make it a perfect Rule, being sufficient to determine all our Doubts, and to decide all Disputes.

The original Writings of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, the *Apostles* and *Evangelists*, have undoubtedly perished long ago, thro the unavoidable Injuries of Time; but it is well known that the *Jews* have been always very zealous, even unto Superstition, to preserve their Copies pure and uncorrupted, from one Age to another. So that there is no great question but the Old Testament has been transmitted down to us entire and free from any considerable Faults, of which the Agreement of the *Samaritan Copy* with the *Jewish Bibles*, and that at the distance of above two thousand Years, and notwithstanding the old Quarrel between the two Nations has been propagated all the while, is an undeniable Proof, as the learned Author of the *Remarks upon a Discourse of Free-Thinking* has shewn, Part 1. p. 53.

And that the *Jews*, before the coming of Christ, did not designedly corrupt the Text, is certain, because he never blamed them on this account: for it can't be supposed that he should so freely reprove them for other Crimes, and particularly charge them with *rendring the Commandments of God ineffectual by their Traditions, and with teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and yet over-

verlook their corrupting the Text itself, which would have been the greatest Crime of all ; and above all others needed Animadversion. But our Lord was so far from charging them with this, that he does tacitly excuse and acquit them of it, when he refers Persons so often to the Scriptures, and charges them to search and consult them, in order to discover him to be the true Messiah.

And that they have not done it since our Saviour's time, is also very evident ; since those places which Christ and his Apostles have quoted in the New Testament, agree to the reading of the Old. Whence it appears, that there has been no Alteration in them. And if the *Jews* had at all corrupted the Old Testament, no doubt they would have done it in opposition to Christianity : but even the Prophecies of Christ, and those Places which make most for the Christian Religion, continue as firm and pertinent to that purpose, as ever. Nay, some have observed, that where the *Hebrew* Bible differs from the *Greek*, or *Latin*, (which is not in matters of great moment) the difference is rather against the *Jews* than for them *. Besides, the Old Testament has been preserved by *Christians* as well as by *Jews*, and that from the very beginning of Christianity : and as soon as *Christians* and *Jews* began to separate from one another, and their Religions to be looked upon as opposite ; mutual Jealousy could not but restrain each side from attempting to corrupt the Text, or make it impossible to effect it.

And there is abundance of reason to believe, that the New Testament has been preserved with no less Care and Success. The original Writings were not entrusted in the hands of private Persons, but committed to the Care of whole Churches : and during the Lives of those Persons, whose Names the Sacred Writings do bear, and others who were living Witnesses of the things therein contained, it could not but be a vain and foolish Attempt for any to go about to alter them. While they lived, they were themselves the Assertors and Defenders of the Sacred Writings ; and upon their Decease this Charge devolv'd upon the whole Body of Christians, who cannot be suspected in the least to have been careless and indolent in a Matter upon which all Christianity did depend. The Ori-

* *Vid.* Waltoni *Proleg.* vii. §. 4, &c.

ginals themselves were preserved for a considerable * time; and none were allowed to take Copies of them, but Persons whose Diligence and Integrity were well known and approved by the Church; which therefore was done with a great deal of Care and Exactness, till such a Number of Copies was dispersed all over the World, that it was judg'd absurd and ridiculous in any to pretend to falsify them; inso-much that the Hereticks of the earliest Rise scarce ever attempted this way to corrupt the Christian Faith. They did not pretend to produce other Copies as more genuine or pure than those which were in possession of the Orthodox; but took other Methods, either to deny at once the Authority of those Writings, or to set up others, in opposition to them, which favour'd and supported their wild Conceits, and which had no other Original than their own Invention, and never were heard of in the Christian Church till some monstrous Opinion was started, which could be defended no other way. Thus *Basilides* and *Valentin* made Gospels of their own, yet did not pretend to deny that the truly Sacred Writings were genuine; and accordingly, upon occasion, made use of them when they thought they could wrest them to their own Purposes; as Dr. *Mill* has observed at large, *Proleg. Par. 2.*

Indeed, the same learned Writer further informs us, That *Marcion* and others did endeavour to corrupt the Sacred Text; but they could go no farther than their own Copies, and their Alterations were presently condemn'd by the Harmony of all others, which were by this time multiplied to a great Number: For *Marcion's Canon*, who was the first that endeavour'd to corrupt the Text of Scripture, was not compos'd till about the Year of Christ 130; but the *Evangelical Canon* was settled in the Year 99, or two Years after St. *John* writ his Gospel, and ten Years afterwards the *Apostolical Canon* was fixed. "Quick enough, if it be considered that they were to be gathered (whither they had been directed) from so many and so distant Parts of the World," as the Author of the *Remarks* has observ'd, *Part 1. p. 62.* So that all the Books of Scripture were collected into one, and the *Canon* settled about the Year 109, which was one and twenty Years before *Marcion*. And during that space, which Dr. *Mill* calls the *Pure and Virgin State of the Church*, there is no

* *Vid. Grot. de Verit. Ch. Rel. Lib. 3. §. 15.*

room for any Suspicion that the Copies of Scripture were corrupted in the least: And in that space of one and twenty Years, it is reasonable to suppose that many thousand Copies, taken with the greatest Accuracy, were dispers'd into distant Parts of the World. So that it was impossible that *Marcion's* Alterations, or any others after him, should be soisted into the Sacred Text, or be received as such by any but his own Disciples. Besides, it may be considered, that about this time, or soon after, the New Testament was translated into several Languages, as *Syriack*, *Ethiopick*, *Arabick*, and *Latin*; which Versions are now extant, and don't differ from the *Greek* Copies in Matters of any Moment.* And since the Church of God has been watchful in all Generations to preserve their Copies pure and uncorrupted, we have no reason to doubt but those which have been transmitted down to us are so.

But yet it can't be suppos'd that the Scriptures are free from the Mistakes of Transcribers; and how far this does affect the Certainty of them, as our Rule, ought to be consider'd. And,

1. We may observe that by the Harmony of many Copies and divers Translations, it appears that no considerable Errors have crept into them this way neither; for all different Parties have of old, and still do, use and cite them alike.

2. There are several ways whereby we may judge, and be certain, which is the true Reading, *viz.* by the Writings of the Antients, or the old Versions, or by comparing the Copies we now have; but above all, by the Context and Coherence of Scripture it self, or by parallel Places in it. And after we have made the best use of our Judgment herein, we have no reason to doubt but we may take that Reading which appears to be most genuine. *Walt. Proleg. 6. §. 6.*

3. And so the learned Author of the *Remarks* has observ'd, " That the Text of Scripture has suffer'd no more Variations than what must necessarily have happen'd from the Nature of Things, and what are common, and in equal proportion, in all Classicks whatever: That the more Copies we have, the more they must of course be multiplied. And yet a Multitude of Copies are of great advantage to settle the real Text; some preserving the true Reading in one

* *Grosius de Ver. Ch. R. Lib. 3. §. 15.*

“ place, and some in another: That so by an accurate and judicious Collation of various Readings, the Text is made more correct.” As he shews very evidently, by a Parallel drawn from profane Authors, Part 1. §. 32.

4. But tho the Scripture has been conveyed to us thro the hands of weak and fallible Men, yet we have abundant reason to believe that the Providence of God has been particularly watchful over it, because it was designed to be of perpetual Use and Duration; and because we can't reconcile it to the Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness of God, that he should suffer any Book to go under his Name, and carry his Authority, that should lead Persons into unavoidable and destructive Errors, who were sincerely desirous to please and obey him. And accordingly, the most learned Men, who have searched with the greatest Diligence and Accuracy into these Things, have acknowledged that the different Readings are not so considerable, as to alter the Sense of Scripture in Matters necessary to Salvation; that no new Doctrine can be form'd from them; and that no Article of Faith does depend upon them. *Walton* gives us an Account of the Judgment of some of the greatest Divines, both Protestants and Papists, to this purpose; from whom I shall mention a few *. *Lud. Capellus* says, *That notwithstanding the Variety of Copies, the saving Doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles is deliver'd in them all.* And *Sixtinus Amama*, speaking of the Old Testament, challenges Persons to produce one single Reading out of them all that is detrimental to the Orthodox Faith, or to Godliness. In like manner *Bochart*, *Heinsius*, *Usher*, &c. And among the Popish Writers, *Bellarmino* acknowledges, *That the various Readings are not of such moment as to affect the Perfection of the Scripture in Matters of Faith and Practice; for the most part, they are only different Modes of Speech, which alter the Sense little or nothing.* And thus *Grotius*, after he had acknowledged the Change of some Words, or Syllables, or Letters, by the Carelessness of Scribes, expresses himself; *But to say that all the Copies are corrupted either by Design, or any other way, in those Things which belong to any Doctrine, or any remarkable History, is more than can ever be proved.* † I shall only add one Passage more out of the learned Author

* Proleg. 6. §. 2, 3, 4.

† De Ver. Ch. Rel. Lib. 3. §. 15.

of the Remarks, who says, That *the Text is competently exact in the worst Manuscript now extant: Nor is one Article of Faith or moral Precept perverted or lost in them, chuse as awkwardly as you can, chuse the worst by Design out of the whole Lump of Readings.* And so he concludes, *That with all the present Changes the whole Scripture is perfect, and sufficient to all the great Ends and Purposes of its first writing.* †

And we may be satisfied from Reason, as well as from History, that the Church of God has always kept a watchful Eye over the Scriptures, because nothing can be imagined to be of greater Importance than this, and therefore nothing did more necessarily call for their Zeal and Faithfulness. And so upon this account it seems likely that *the Church of the living God is called the Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 1 Tim. 3. 15. *i. e.* the whole Catholick Church, among whom true Copies of the Sacred Writings were dispers'd, or a Succession of good Men in all Ages, who should uphold and bear up the Reputation of the Scriptures, as a Succession of Children do uphold and bear up the Name and Credit of their Ancestors.

From these Things we may conclude that the Scriptures, as our Rule, are certain: They are sufficient to determine all our Doubts, to decide all our Controversies, and beyond them we can appeal to nothing more certain: They are able to give us as much Satisfaction as can be desired, and as is consistent with our present State; wherein we are to live by Faith, and trust in God, and so to put an end to all Disputes, as effectually as any Rule can be imagined to do.

And hence it appears, that in making use of the Scriptures as our Rule, our Diligence ought to be employed two ways: (1.) We ought, as far as we are capable, to search after the original Perfection of them, wherein every Word, and every Letter, stood exactly right. (2.) If we have no Reason to question, or no Capacity to enquire after this, we ought to study, by a sincere Application of Mind, and by humble Prayer to God, to understand them the best we can; and in so doing we have the utmost Certainty that we please God, and do our Duty, because he requires no more of us, and because we follow all the Evidence that lies within the Compass of our Power.

† *Ubi supra.*

All Protestants seem to agree that the Scriptures are such a Rule as this, however they differ in the Use and Application of them: The Scriptures, I mean, as made up of the Books of the Old and New Testament. The Old is a Rule to us in all those Things whereof it gives us any Account, and as far they do any way affect and concern us. For tho we are to believe all Things therein revealed, and may make useful Observations upon them; and tho some Things contained therein are of perpetual Use and Obligation; yet there are other Things that do not directly concern us, and in which we are not obliged to take that Book for our Rule.

The New Testament contains the full and plain Revelation of Christianity; and this is our Rule, by which we ought to judge what is properly Christian, and what is not. And since there is a close Connection between both, so far they may be considered to have the Use of a Rule with respect to each other: The Old to be a Measure whereby we judge of some things in the New; and again, the New to be a Measure which does explain and authorize other things in the Old. But in the Sequel of this Discourse I shall principally mean the New Testament, when I mention the Scriptures indefinitely.

It may now be enquired whether the Words or the Sense of Scripture be our Rule: And it seems very plain that both together make up the Rule; and they can't be separated, because of the natural Connexion between Words and Sense. Words that have no Meaning are altogether useless, and can't help us to judge of any thing: Therefore the Words of Scripture can't be our Rule without the Sense. And again, the Sense of Scripture can't be our Rule without the Words, because the Words alone determine and fix the Sense of it; and we can never come to understand the Scripture, nor have any good Grounds to believe we do understand it, but by the Words. So that if we take the Sense of Scripture as we understand it, and leave the Words, or put it into other Words, they can signify nothing but our Interpretation of Scripture; which tho it should be ever so agreeable to the true Meaning of it, yet the Words which we use can by no means be made a Rule to others, nor looked upon as Scripture, because the very Words of Scripture give Authority to the Sense of it, and certify it to be so; which by a Change of Words is utterly lost. And indeed a very small Change of Words
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may convey a different Sense, by which means the Rule is perverted: and how the Sense of Scripture should be preserved, so as to carry with it any degree of Authority, in composing long Forms, Articles, Creeds, &c. seems difficult to conceive.

The Scripture therefore put into our Words, cannot be obligatory upon others: they may indeed help others to apprehend the Meaning of Scripture, and so may be useful, which is the Advantage of Interpreters and Commentators. But the Scripture considered as a Rule, must lie in its own Words, because the Authority of it entirely depends upon these: and a Rule without Authority is of no use.

Again, if any thing that is measured by the Rule of Scripture, and found to agree with it, in the Opinions of Men, or received by them as the Sense of Scripture, is to be accounted of, and used as our Rule; the Consequence is, That every Man may challenge this Privilege to himself, and set up his Sentiments, as the Sense of Scripture, to be a Rule to others; unless you can fix upon something to determine whose are, and whose are not so. And the Proof of this must be by some external Sign, for an inward Persuasion is what every Man is possess'd of; and generally the weakest Men, whose Interpretations of Scripture are founded upon the slightest Reasons, take the fastest hold here. But if you have recourse to the Assistance of the Spirit, who is indeed a Spirit of Truth, and who does undoubtedly lead and guide Mens Minds into a right understanding of the Scriptures; yet when Persons claim his Assistance, and upon this foundation set up to be Guides of others, or positively to determine the Sense of Scripture for others, then the matter does immediately require and call for Proof. And they that pretend to it, are obliged to demonstrate, that they have the Assistance of the Spirit, and that others have not, or that they have it in a greater measure than others; because this Inequality is the only thing that can justify them in setting up their Sense of Scripture, as the Rule, and others in receiving it as such. And for Persons to pretend to this, and not prove it by Miracles, which is its proper Evidence, appears to be no small degree of Enthusiasm.

I shall only add upon this Head, That a Man may really perceive the Sense of Scripture-Words, and yet not perceive the Sense of those we make use of, tho we for
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our selves may think they do exactly express the meaning of Scripture.

II. Let us, in the next place, consider to what End this Rule is given us by God. Which, in general, is to reveal his Mind and Will to us; to inform our Understandings with the Knowledge of Divine Truths, and to direct and persuade us, upon just Considerations, to chuse that which is good, and to refuse that which is evil, in order to our eternal Happiness. It is designed to make known all that Men wanted to know, and all that God only wise judged fit for them to know, in this Life. It reveals the Mystery of Godliness, which the Light of Nature could not penetrate into, and which we could never have known but by this means. It improves and corroborates our natural Notions of God, and our Duty, and of a future State. *All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works, 2 Tim. 3. 16, 17.* So that the ultimate End is to honour God, and to promote our Happiness. The more immediate and subordinate Ends are,

1. To regulate our Faith.
2. To regulate our Worship.
3. To regulate our Actions.
4. To unite all Christians together.

And since the ultimate End depends upon these four things, if the Scripture be sufficient to accomplish them, it must be also sufficient for its great and ultimate End.

I. The Scripture is given to regulate our Faith. Which it does, by manifesting and proposing to our Belief things that are true and indubitable. The foundation on which we receive and assent unto them, is the Testimony of God himself; who being infinitely Good and Just, cannot be suspected to have the least Design to deceive his Creatures; nor can any thing be imagined more absurd, than that he should attempt it. Therefore, whatever degree of Certainty we have, that a Proposition is asserted by God, the same Certainty we have, that it is true. Therefore his Word is a proper Rule of Faith, being able, as far as we understand it, to fix our Judgment of Things, and to determine all our Doubts. Nay, in matters above our Comprehension, which we don't perceive how they are or can be true, yet we have all the reason that can be,

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to acquiesce in the Testimony of God, that they must be true. So that the Mysteries of Religion, which we can't fully reconcile to those Notions which we have once entertained, either by Education, or by conversing with Men, are not to be rejected on this account : but since they come from God, we may safely rely upon his Veracity, that they cannot but be true ; and that the reason why we don't now perceive it, is, because they are not sufficiently explained unto us, or because our Faculties are not yet capable to receive them.

The Scripture as a Rule is given to teach us what we are to believe concerning God and a future State, to possess our Minds with right and proper Considerations, to fix us upon true and solid Principles, that we might direct our Behaviour to our highest End, and be swayed therein by the best Motives. And in order to make the due use of it, we ought first of all to search into it, and to make diligent Enquiry after the Truths therein revealed, and to get all the Instruction we can from it. This being done, we ought upon all occasions to refer our selves to Scripture, as when any Doubt does arise in our Minds concerning a thing which we did before yield Assent unto : and then we ought to compare all the Instruction that is offered us from others with the Scripture, and so measure all our Sentiments by that Rule, which is invariably true : in those things, I mean, of which the Scripture is designed to inform us ; for indeed the Light of Nature does discover some things to our Belief, as *that God is, &c.* wherein the Scripture can't so properly be called our Rule, because it takes the thing for granted.

And the proper way to come at the Knowledge or Belief of Truth, as it is proposed in the Scripture, is to examine the words of it, and to consider all those things that help us to a right meaning of them, and so to fix the Sense according to the common and necessary Laws of Interpretation, which must be always allowed ; and when we understand and assent to the Words of Scripture, we do believe the Truth, which is the true meaning of Scripture-Words, and nothing else in Christianity ought to be so called : but if we put a wrong Sense upon the Words, and assent thereunto, we embrace an Error instead of Truth.

The reason therefore why any Notion or Doctrine we hold is true or false, is the Agreement or Disagreement thereof

thereof with the Scripture; and accordingly we ought to think ourselves in the right, and others in the wrong, upon this foundation only. The Scripture is absolutely true and certain, our Sentiments are so conditionally; we can't therefore have an equal Certainty that our Opinions are true, as we have that the Scripture is so, if we think soberly of our selves, and according to our Measure: and the reason of this Condition is, because we are fallible, liable to Mistakes, and consequently the Sense we put upon Scripture-Words is so too; but the Scripture itself is true infallibly, and no Error can possibly be imputed to it.

I would here be understood to speak of Matters of Faith, and not of Matters of certain Knowledge, which are self-evident, and can't be doubted of. The Scripture, with respect to both, contains nothing but what is equally certain; and in things that appear plain or obscure to us, it says nothing but what is really and exactly *the Truth*. But our Interpretations of Scripture can't be so called, without ascribing the same Infallibility to our Judgments as to the Scriptures. Nay, they are more or less probable, according to the degrees of Evidence which we are able to produce for them; but absolute Certainty is due to every Word of God. And indeed, should we allow that the Certainty of our Minds, concerning the Interpretations of Scripture, is exactly answerable to the Certainty that runs thro all parts of Scripture it self; it would follow, either that the Scripture is as fickle and variable as the Persuasions and Opinions of Men, or that the Judgments of Men are as steady and certain as Scripture: both which destroy the use of Scripture as a Rule.

The matter seems to lie here. Our Interpretations of Scripture differ from the express Word of God, as *Reason* and *Revelation*. God requires us to believe upon certain infallible Grounds; and so we do, as long as our Faith is founded upon his express Word. But our Reason must be employed to find out the Sense and Meaning hereof, and must be conducted herein by the necessary Laws of Interpretation, which are no other than the Principles of Reason. It is by this Medium that we come to understand, and so to believe God himself, (even tho the Holy Spirit of God assists us) so that our Interpretations of Scripture are immediately founded upon the Exercise of Reason,
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and therefore can come with no greater force when proposed to others, than the Strength of Argument and the right Application of the Laws of Interpretation can give them. Which if Men don't perceive, they ought, nay they can't chuse but refuse them; and we can't be sure that they are true, without being sure that we have conducted our Reason exactly right in finding them out, and observed all the necessary Laws of Interpretation. And who can pretend to this in matters of a sublime and difficult nature? And yet if we don't go upon this foundation, we must give way to Enthusiasm, and no body knows what. But the Truth of Revelation depends upon a higher and a more certain Principle, even upon the Testimony and Authority of God himself, which admits of no dispute, and which we can never call into question; but if we don't understand him, we must however acquiesce in his infinite Understanding and inflexible Veracity. Hence it follows, that if Men don't take in the force of our Reasoning, and receive our Interpretations, we can't certainly conclude that they reject the Word of God; for this would be directly to claim Infallibility; which whether it be grounded upon the Inspiration of God, or an unerring Conduct of our Reason, comes to the same thing. While we observe this Inequality therefore, we keep Reason in subordination to Revelation; but when we are as positive and peremptory that our Interpretations are the Truth, as that Scripture itself is so, we confound Reason and Revelation, and put one upon a Level with the other.

And so when we are exhorted to contend for the Faith, it is not to be imagined, that when we have once settled our Interpretations of Scripture, and drawn our Doctrines out of them, (as all Men pretend to do) we should then presently have done with the Rule, and contend for our Persuasions and Belief: But by *Faith* in this and such-like places, we are to understand the Object, or Rule of Faith, and are to contend for that, by vindicating its Authority, by asserting and maintaining the genuine Words of it, by taking proper Methods to fix the Sense of them, and then as it appears to us, after a diligent and honest Search, with Modesty and Charity to recommend it to the Approbation of others. For it is very difficult to suppose, if not absurd, that the Doctrines of the Gospel put into the Words of Men, should be called and accounted by

by the Scripture to be the Object of *Faith*, or that every Man's particular Persuasion should be the thing which the Scripture commands him directly and immediately to contend earnestly for; because the Scripture can only be understood to speak in such cases of a Divine Faith, which can be no other than what is founded immediately upon a Divine Testimony; but how the Interpretations of Men are so, will not easily be made appear.

No Man, indeed, can help thinking his Interpretations of Scripture, which after the most diligent Search he has concluded upon, are true; but if he will therefore set them up, and insist upon them as Truth itself: so far as he does so, the Scripture ceases to be his Rule. He may own it has been of that use to him formerly, but he must also own, that he has done with it, and that now he is become capable himself of being a Rule, and may accordingly claim this Privilege to himself.

2. The Scripture is given to regulate our Worship. This Part of Religion is in some measure taught us by the Light of Nature. Prayer and Praise, which are the groundwork hereof, are plain Precepts of Nature; but Scripture does very much direct, and manage, and guide our Notions hereof, and does farther add all those things which are necessary to render our Worship pleasing and acceptable to God, which were exceedingly wanted by Mankind; for we find Persons who had never received a Revelation, tho' they have universally agreed upon some sort of Worship or other, yet have run into the most wild and abominable Extravagancies that can be imagined: insomuch, that this part of Natural Religion has oftentimes been performed in perfect repugnance to the Moral Part; and sometimes the Institutions of the Heathens have been thought fit to be ascribed to the Devil, as the only Author of them.

Mankind therefore stood in the utmost need of a Revelation, to direct and over-rule their Natural Notions of worshipping a Deity, that they might know to whom they ought to pay that Homage and Reverence which they knew was due somewhere; that they might have such a Sense of the only true God fixed upon their Minds, as would at once encourage them to draw near and serve him, and yet preserve an awful Regard and Veneration for him; that they might be informed what it is that God does chiefly regard in them that worship him, and what does

does add Efficacy to, and procure the Success of their Services: and further, that they might know what God does expect they should present unto him; together with the Manner and fit Season thereof.

Now the Scripture has given us plain Directions in all these things, and has left nothing untouched to be supplied by the Contrivances and Inventions of Men. And since God has given us Light herein, it seems reasonable to think, that Men are obliged, not only to conform themselves, but also to confine themselves thereunto, and that primarily to the express Words of Scripture; and where these fail us, with regard to any particular Circumstances, we ought still to take all our Measures from Scripture, by acting according to the best and truest Consequences that we are capable of deducing from it. And the Nature of the thing seems strongly to determine the matter thus. For what is Adoration, but an humble express Acknowledgment of the Sovereignty of God, and his Dominion over us? Which can't be done in our own way, and according to our own pleasure, without preferring our own Inventions to his Prescriptions, and setting our own Wills in opposition to his; which, instead of owning his Sovereignty, is directly the contrary.

Since therefore the Scripture is given to direct our Worship, which is plain from many places in it; the Nature of the thing, as well as divers Texts of Scripture, do oblige us to adhere to that as our only Rule. And that we may the better perceive how the Scripture is our Rule herein, we may consider some things in Worship as *fixed*, others as *variable*.

Those things which are *fixed*, are all those which are necessary to constitute an entire Act of Worship; as the *Object* of it, who is God only; besides whom none has any claim to an absolute unlimited Subjection. The *End* of it, which is to honour God, and in consequence thereof, to receive some Benefit to our selves; and without such a Design, we can't think to succeed at all. The *Matter* of it, which must be an Action that God himself has instituted and ordained. And the *Manner*, which is to direct us how to manage the Action, and what we are to respect in it. And finally, the *Temper and Disposition* of those who worship, which is Sincerity, or such Thoughts and Affections as are suitable to the business we are employed in; as Faith and Hope, Love to God and Men,

Humility, and the like. These things seem to be the necessary Parts of Worship, and the Scripture with respect to them to be an absolute Rule, that requires our constant and universal Conformity to it, and in which we are not suffered to vary the least from it, by omitting any thing which it does enjoin, for these things are established by plain and express Precepts; nor by adding any thing that is not so required. And, except the *Matter* of Worship, these things have scarce ever been disputed among Protestants. For who can deny that God is the only Object of Adoration, or that his Glory is the great End we ought to aim at? But it has been, and is still a Controversy, what ought to be the *Matter* of Worship; and almost as many things have been brought into Christian Worship, as did of old belong to the *Jewish*. But the reason hereof is manifestly because Men have gone off from the foundation of the Scriptures; and as soon as ever we depart from this only certain Rule, we are left to our selves, and every Man's Fancy and Imagination may prescribe to him without Reason, and without End.

There are other things belonging to Worship which may be considered as *variable*, viz. *Time*, and *Place*, and other external *Circumstances*, because they are, and must be altered by Persons of different Conditions and Circumstances in the World. And the Scripture seems to be a Rule to us in these things, only by way of consequence. Herein therefore greater Latitude is allowed to every Man to exercise his own private Judgment, the Scripture not being a direct and positive Rule to us in these things, but only so as by an honest impartial Search into it, we are able to judge how we may act most acceptably to God, by applying general Rules to particular Cases.

As for the *Time* of Worship; that some Time must be allowed for it, the necessity of the thing does require; but what particular Times and Seasons, the Scripture seems to have left undetermined. And that the first Day of the Week should be consecrated to Divine Service, seems rather to depend upon good and just Consequences drawn from Scripture, than the express Declarations of it. How often we are to worship, is not, and cannot be exactly set down, as long as one Rule is in force, viz. *That God will have Mercy rather than Sacrifice*; because we can't tell when those Works of Mercy will come in the way of Sacrifice,
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and so prevent it. But yet the Scripture is our Rule herein, and has given us such Directions as are sufficient to guide every Man, who has Sincerity enough to apply them. As when we are commanded to *pray always*, and to *give thanks in every thing*, &c. an honest Mind will be ready to conclude from hence, that Persons should be always disposed and forward to perform these Duties, and not suffer any frivolous Pretence, much less any Occasion of Sin and Wickedness, to hinder them.

In like manner the Scripture has no where determined the particular *Place* of Worship, but has taken away all Holiness of this kind, and left it entirely to the Prudence and Convenience of Men to assemble where they think proper. So that in this, and other external *Circumstances*, as Gesture of the Body, and the like, they are only to observe such general Rules, *that all Things be done decently, and in order*, &c.

3. The Scripture is given to regulate our Actions and Behaviour. Which it does by prescribing to us our whole Duty towards God, and towards Man; and by shewing us upon what Foundation of Obedience we may satisfy ourselves of the Favour of God, and hope for the Enjoyment of him.

We have from the Law of Nature the Knowledge of Good and Evil in a great measure, and did not absolutely need a Rule to direct us in all Things, without exception. And the Scripture seems to build very much, in this Particular, upon a Foundation already laid; and rather to improve and strengthen it, than to add any thing new. Nothing in Religion was so well understood by the Heathens as *Moral Virtue*; and there is scarce any Christian Virtue mention'd in Scripture, but what does plainly appear to be in some measure understood by the Philosophers in their Writings; and oftentimes the very same Things are enjoin'd by the Scripture, as they taught their Disciples, but with very great advantage: For the Scripture has made these Things more clear, and more certain, by giving us a plain and uniform Scheme of them, by discovering more fully the Nature and Perfections of God; which guide our Judgments with very strong Light, and raise in us more sublime Notions of Virtue, especially of Love and Charity, which are peculiarly display'd in the Gospel. And then the Example of the Son of God, who fulfilled all

all Righteousness in our Nature, renders the Practice hereof more easy and more familiar to us.

The Scripture does also enforce the Practice of Virtue with much greater Advantage than the Law of Nature could, by displaying the Sovereign Authority of God, who demands it, and by annexing the Sanctions of eternal Rewards and Punishments most clearly and expressly; and hereby conducts our Aims and Designs in the performance of our Duty to our highest End.

And further, the Scripture not only enjoins and insists upon the Action, but also upon the inward Thoughts and Affections; in which it is more spiritual and refined than the Law of Nature, and in all these things better accommodated to answer the End of Virtue, even to make us *holy as God is holy*; and therefore is a most excellent and compleat Rule.

Since the Law of Nature does furnish us with so full and certain Knowledge of our Duty; for *the Gentiles did shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their Thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another*, Rom. 2. 15. the Scripture therefore can't be considered to be so entirely a Rule to us herein, as in Matters of Faith and pure Revelation. Yet the Reason of Mankind being very much impair'd, we can't but acknowledge, and that with the utmost Thankfulness, that a Discovery of the Will of God was very useful, if not necessary to supply its Defects, to settle and fix our Notions of Good and Evil, and to add Force and Weight unto them; because we find the Lives of the Heathens, notwithstanding their Knowledge, were almost universally corrupted, and their Manners most vile and monstrous. Which, in some measure, may be imputed to the Uncertainty of their Minds, when they went beyond the first and undeniable Precepts of Religion; and that this Knowledge was almost confined to speculative and thoughtful Men, and almost lost among the Vulgar, for want of some settled and acknowledged Standard to preserve it. Which Evils are remedied by the Scripture; and therefore it ought to be looked upon as a Rule superadded to the Light of Nature, and consequently superior to it: For tho it can't be supposed that our Reason does ever thwart with Revelation, both proceeding from the same Author, yet if Men should have any Suggestions from

from Nature, which they apprehend it lawful, or a Duty, to follow and comply with, which yet the Scripture does forbid, it is reasonable to think they ought to be overruled by the Determinations of Scripture; which is given for our more full and certain Direction, and to explain our natural Notions, and to decide all Disputes and Doubts that may arise in our Minds concerning our Duty. Besides, Men in judging what they ought to do, or not do, may be, and often are, swayed by the Bias and Influence of their Affections: But the Scripture is a steady and invariable Rule; and therefore our last Appeal should be made unto it.

Hence it appears that the Scripture is our only Rule in Matters of Duty, unless in those Cases where the Light of Nature is allowed to be sufficient, and where the Scripture trusts us to its Discoveries, and takes its Dictates for Things known and granted.

'Tis likewise evident from hence, that a greater Liberty is allowed us to judge concerning our Duty, and interpret for our selves what we ought to do, than what we are to believe. Our Faith ought to be more confined and kept, as much as can be, within the strict Words of Scripture; but our Duty may and ought to be enlarged, and reaches as far as by good and just Consequence we can carry it. For the Scripture teaches us our Duty, and is a Rule to us herein: Primarily, by prescribing to us in plain and express Words those good Actions, Desires, and Affections, which are necessary and essential to the Life of Religion. By not complying with these heartily and sincerely, we must needs be judged disobedient to God, and consequently out of his Favour: But if a Man should stop here, and think himself no further obliged than the strict Words of Scripture do lead him, he can't chuse but live in the Neglect of some Things which God would have him to do. For God can't but approve of all the Consequences that do justly arise from any of his Laws; and a Person that is sensible what they are, and yet does not conform to them, must live and act in repugnance to what he thinks his Duty, and so render his other Performances vain and ineffectual.

There are some Things in Religion good and commendable, because of their Use and Tendency to promote the express and essential Duties of it, and because they prepare us for and confirm us in the Practice of our immediate Duty;

Duty ; yet for which we can produce no plain and express Text of Scripture, tho in doing them we take our Measures from Scripture: because Consequences drawn from the Laws and Commandments of God, must derive and carry with them that Degree of Authority that is proportionable to the Force and Justness of the Consequence. And in these matters every Man is bound to use his own Judgment, and to follow his own Conscience, with the utmost Honesty and Impartiality.

And the like may be said concerning evil Actions. The Scripture does expressly mention those vile and abominable Sins which are called the *Lusts of the Flesh, and of the Mind*, which utterly exclude Men from the *Kingdom of Heaven*. Besides which, we may by necessary Consequence conclude, that whatever is disagreeable to the Precepts and Injunctions of Scripture is sinful, whether it be admitted into our Thoughts only, or proceed further into our Affections and Behaviour. And in these Things Persons are in a great measure left to their own Sincerity and Faithfulness, and will easily be led into that which is right, by following the Inclinations of a new and heavenly Nature.

But tho a ready and willing Disposition to obey God be of great use, and indeed necessary to apply the Scripture effectually as our Rule ; yet it must take all its Measures from Scripture, and never pretend to invent or prescribe to it self ; because this would be in effect to set up another Rule: For tho the Scripture does require our Diligence and Faithfulness in judging of our Duty, yet as a Rule it ties us down, and obliges us to take all our Instructions from it, and leaves us no Power or Authority in the least to prescribe to our selves or others ; tho we should attempt it with ever so innocent a Design, yet it could not be allowed us by Scripture, without rendring it self in a great measure insignificant.

So that whatever is esteemed good by Men, and incumbent upon them as their Duty, which is not expressly commanded by Scripture, or by good Consequence, (of which every Man is to judge for himself) has not the Approbation of Scripture, is falsely so esteem'd, and cannot be obligatory upon any ; neither is the Performance thereof to be accounted Obedience to God, (the plain and certain Duties of natural Religion only excepted) but on the contrary, the Observation of any such thing is like to prove hurtful

ful and pernicious to us; because it may take place of those Duties which our only Lord and Master has enjoin'd us, and so render his Commandments of no effect; or be superadded thereunto, and so needlessly take up our Time and Labour, to the prejudice of Things more important.

Indeed, in some Cases we are to obey Men, as Parents and Magistrates; and in so doing we please God. But then this must be done in subordination to God, and in consequence of his own Laws, who has settled this Order among Men, and both by the Light of Nature, and by his written Word, has signified his Pleasure, that we should observe it. And in obeying them, we must beware and see that their Commands do not contradict his; for it can't be suppos'd that God should commit unto Men a Right of obliging us in opposition to himself, no more than it can be supposed that God should place his Creatures above himself, or allow them to act in contradiction to his own Will. This therefore does not over-turn, but rather confirm what has been before said.

4. The Scripture is given as a Rule, or Instrument, to unite Christians among themselves.

The Union that is principally enjoin'd by God, and desirable among Men, is that of Love and Affection, and no other appears practicable. Uniformity of Opinion may, and often does, subsist amidst mutual Jealousies, Hatred, and great Disaffection towards one another; and tho' it be a desirable thing that all Men should agree in the Knowledge of the Truth, yet we find it is not to be expected while we are in this imperfect State: Neither can we suppose that the Scripture was design'd to produce this, in order to reconcile and unite Men in Love to one another, since it allows Men cannot be absolutely perfect, *that we know now but in part, that we see thro a Glass darkly, and that we are to live here by Faith, and not by Sight*; and yet requires all Christians to love one another.

But tho' such an Uniformity cannot be expected, and is not required in order to Union, yet there must be some Agreement of Sentiments, and especially of Disposition, without which a Union amongst Men would be absurd and impossible. Persons must have some Foundation in common, upon which all must stand, in order to be united to one another. And since all Christians are to be thus united, without excluding any, the Foundation therefore must be large
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enough for every Christian to have footing upon it. Thus we find the Christian Society is compared to a *Building*, whereof the whole Weight rests upon one Foundation, which is that of *the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner-stone*, Eph. ii. 20, 21. All Christians then should be united together upon one solid common Scheme: And what can answer this End but the Scriptures? These are the Foundation that God has laid, and none has a Right to lay any other. The Scripture surely must be sufficient to accomplish all that Union which it enjoins, and which it was designed to promote by its Author: And any other Union among Christians but what is built upon Scripture, seems to be raised upon a wrong Bottom, and to be unwarrantable.

Now the Union which the Scripture does require among Christians, consists in a hearty Subjection to, and Dependence upon Christ as their Head, and then in a mutual Love and Affection to one another for his sake, by his Direction, and according to his Will. And if this be true, it seems a necessary Consequence that the Scripture must be sufficient, and the only Instrument upon which all Christians are to unite; because Christ has left his Disciples no other Instrument or Articles of Agreement but the Scriptures.

And they seem very proper to accomplish this End, because of their Authority, and because of their internal Certainty.

(1.) Because of their Authority: For if Christians should offer to unite upon any other Scheme that is propos'd to them, tho by wise and good Men, how can it possibly be determined what shall be accepted and agreed upon but by some decisive Authority; since all Christians, as such, have an equal Claim to determine this, which is indeed none at all, as long as Christ is their only Head and King? Something therefore that bears his Name and Authority should be laid as the Foundation, upon which his Followers ought to unite. And what is there of this kind to be met with in the World, but the Scriptures? No Man, who professes himself a Christian, does in the least hesitate and object against the Scripture; nor can any one pretend the least Right over others, to introduce any thing else. This therefore is a Foundation large enough to hold every Christian, and upon that account very proper to unite them all.

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(2.) The like may be said as to their internal Certainty: For as the Foundation of Christian Union should be large enough for the whole Body of Christians to stand upon, so it ought to be solid, that Persons may rest upon it with Ease and Satisfaction. And where can a Man repose himself safely, but upon the Scriptures? There we believe upon incontestable Evidence, and the greatest Certainty: Here every Man stands upon sure Grounds, and is held up by divine Supports. And while a Man's Mind is filled with such Reflections, he will be the better disposed to Love and Unity, than if he was perplexed with needless Doubts and Jealousies; which yet can hardly be avoided by any reasonable and considerable Man, who rashly grounds his Faith upon any human Schemes.

Men, by agreeing in the Scriptures only, stand all upon a Level, with respect to one another; and so Christ would have his Disciples to do, and does not allow any to exalt themselves, or to claim an Authority over others. They do herein by a joint Consent pay common Veneration to God, by receiving and admitting his revealed Will as their only Rule, which is certainly the Praise due to him for granting us a Revelation: They shew themselves all Subjects of the same Lord, and that they have no Master but Christ; That they are all governed by one Body of Laws, and therefore make up one entire Community; That they have all equal Privileges and Advantages in Possession, and the same Happiness in Reversion, and therefore look upon one another as Brethren and Fellow-Citizens. And these are the Considerations that will, that can't chuse but inflame the Hearts of Christians with Love to one another, where they *love the Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity.*

And here one may venture a Step further, and say, That the Scripture is not only a proper Instrument to unite Christians, but that nothing else is, or can be.

For tho Men should draw up Articles of Faith, or Confessions, or Creeds, for Peace sake, which in themselves may be very good and agreeable to the Scriptures, yet it is impossible that all sincere Christians should agree herein; not only because of the Variety of Mens Thoughts and Opinions, but because there is no common Obligation upon all to receive them, no, nor the least upon any particular Person; and that for want of divine Authority, and of absolute Certainty.

If Persons are for making Articles of Peace, and settling Conditions of Christian Love and Fellowship, any otherwise than Christ has left them, tho the Name be good, and tho the Design may be so too, yet the Consequence must be to lay Stumbling-Blocks in one another's way, and to make Inclosures within the common Sheep-fold.

If some Men must have the Province to draw up Articles, and others the Burden of subscribing them, the Union herein is formed upon unjust and unequal Terms, contrary to the Design of Christianity. But the Scripture is made ready to our hands by him who had Authority to prescribe to us all, *our common Lord*; and for his sake we ought to acquiesce therein. Whereas those who subscribe human Forms, consent to more, or to something besides what Christ has required, and consequently regard his Will and Rule less than they ought; or they submit to human Authority, that they may be qualified in due time to exercise it themselves; or else seem to acknowledge the Word of God to be deficient, and attempt to bring in something more perfect, which if received will make the Scripture so. Let the best that can be said of it, such a Procedure can produce but a private and inglorious Union.

It is true, *Charity is the Bond of Perfectness*; and Men of different Persuasions may unite very well, tho they have not many common Principles in which they agree. But they who agree upon the Scripture Foundation, have more of these than any other Scheme can furnish us with; and, in a good Sense, seem to agree in all Matters of Faith, because they subscribe to every thing that comes from God, and nothing else. Tho their Interpretations of Scripture are different, yet the Reason of Faith is one and the same; and this is the principal Thing that ties Men fast together, and makes them *Members one of another*: An Agreement to receive every thing that God has revealed, every one in the truest and best Sense he can put upon it, and nothing else *as Religion* in any Sense at all.

It may be, Persons who subscribe Articles of Peace, will be ready to claim the same Union which is amongst them who adhere to Scripture only, and something further, which does result from their Articles: but it is to be feared there is little ground for this Claim; for in reality such Persons agree only with those who subscribe their Articles, and seem to renounce that Union that is built upon Scripture

ture only, because they don't reckon it sufficient, and therefore will not stand with any on that single Bottom. Otherwise, to what Intent and Purpose can other things be added? And is it not plain from Observation, that they who insist upon these things, lay the great and principal stress here? And how far this goes to renounce their uniting upon the foundation of Scripture, ought to be considered.

The Scriptures are *the common Faith*, and by adhering closely to them we preserve the *Unity of the Faith*; but all other Articles are Matters of private Interpretation. And therefore such who insist upon these, seem to confine and limit the Christian Faith, or to break the Unity of it; and how they can be understood to hold Communion with the Catholick Church, or an entire Subjection to Jesus Christ, deserves to be well explained.

Now if the Scriptures are sufficient for these four Ends, they will easily be allowed to be sufficient for their main and principal End, *viz.* to make Men wise to Salvation. For if our Principles are right, and our Practice agreeable thereto; if we worship God in Spirit and in Truth, and preserve the Unity of the Church; who can doubt but we are in a safe State, and may lay hold on Eternal Life, as promised in the Gospel? The Scripture is our warrant and encouragement herein; but if we are not satisfy'd herewith, and should desire the Opinion and Judgment of Men in this matter, it is likely we shall meet with some Condition or other added, to perplex and frighten us; which yet we need not be solicitous about, because it has no good Authority to support it.

III. I come to prove, that the Scriptures are a sufficient Rule to answer all these Ends. And in the general, few Protestants will deny it. The Question is, In what Sense they are sufficient? And surely, no less can be allowed, than that they are sufficient to all the Intents and Purposes for which we wanted them, and for which a Revelation was granted us by God. They are sufficient to all the Ends that History and Doctrine, Precepts and Exhortations, Promises and Threatnings, can answer; to prompt us in our dark and miserable State to aim at Happiness, in the Love and Enjoyment of God; and to conduct us to it. In short, they are sufficiently *full*, and sufficiently *plain*

plain for every Man, so as that nothing of the same kind can be necessary to supply its Defects.

But yet the Sufficiency of Scripture can't be understood to exclude these following things; but on the contrary, they are supposed by it, and entirely consistent with it.

1. The Use and Liberty of every Man's private Judgment. For the Scripture can't direct and regulate our Belief and Practice of itself, no more than a Rule can measure things of itself. Therefore we must consider to whom the Scripture is given, as well as to what End, *viz.* to Persons endued with Faculties of reasoning, and judging concerning the things therein revealed, and of comparing all other things therewith. The Scripture is designed to instruct every Man in those things which are of the utmost Consequence to him, and to furnish him with the best Laws for the Conduct of Life. The great Importance hereof, as well as the Authority of its Author, and its express Demands in calling upon Men to search into it, make it the indispensable Duty of every Man to employ all his Faculties in considering and weighing the Doctrines of Scripture, its Laws, and their Sanctions; and without this, how is it possible the Scripture should ever obtain its intended effect? And it is a matter of the highest Vertue, for Persons to be humble, diligent, and sincere herein; according to which, every Man is accountable for himself unto God. And herein, as much as in any thing, consists the Trial and Probation of every Man. How shall we be able to form our Judgments, or our Practice, as Christians, but by searching into the Mind of Christ? And since this Rule is given to all, we are all equally obliged to make use of it, as such. And for this reason the Scriptures are accommodated to every Man's Capacity, in all those things wherein he is concerned; for as far as they are absolutely above the reach of any Man, so far they are not designed to be a Rule to him; no more than they can in any case be a Rule to one who is absolutely blind and deaf. But nothing that any particular Person is concerned to know, is so; there being nothing of this kind which close Study and a sincere Application, thro the Blessing of God, will not discover. And since Persons are to be judged by the Scriptures, and every Man to give an account of himself; who can think himself excused from the trouble and pains of searching into them, and seeing with his own Eyes, what it is God requires

requires of him? And unless we do this, tho the Scriptures should be a Rule to others, yet thro our Negligence or Contempt, they are not so to us. And hereby we pervert and destroy the Design of God in giving us a Revelation. For a Rule that is never applied to its Use, is utterly spoiled of its End, and so is rendered insignificant, and of no advantage. And if we take up with the Examination of others, and acquiesce in the Sentiments of our Leaders, instead of the Scripture, they are our Rule; and instead of adhering to that which is certain and invariably so, we satisfy ourselves with that which is fickle and uncertain: which brings in another thing to be considered, and joined with the Sufficiency of the Scriptures.

2. The Assistance and Help of Men towards one another, in order to understand the Scripture.

The Scripture has never been accounted by wise and learned Men altogether so plain and easy, but that it will require Study, and close Application, to come to a clear Perception of the Will of God, in many Cases. And this is very proper to exercise our Vertue, our Desire, and Endeavour to get as good an Insight as possible into the Will of God; which, if it be conducted by a true design to please him, deserves to be esteemed one of the highest Christian Vertues. And besides, there are some great Difficulties and seeming Repugnancies, which require the help of human Learning, and a good share of it too, to resolve and reconcile: for which reason it is very proper that some Men should make it the principal or sole Business of their Lives, to search into, and account for these things. And they who do so, can't but be thought to see further into the Design and Meaning of Scripture than others, and consequently to be capable of teaching and instructing others. And if it be a proper Means to get Light into any part of Scripture, to receive and consider the Instruction of those, who have spent more Time and Study about these things, than we could; then it is also proper, and a Duty for us, to enquire and learn of them. But they who teach, ought to give Reasons and Arguments for what they teach, and never expect to be hearken'd to, but for the sake of them; and they who learn, ought seriously and candidly to examine their Instructions, and by comparing things that are less obvious with those that are more plain and certain, be led by rational Steps
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into the Acknowledgment of the Truth. For such a Sufficiency of Scripture cannot be allowed, as would exclude any Means of Learning and Teaching that are proper, or that are instituted by Scripture, for illustrating or pressing it on the Minds of Men.

3. Another thing to be joined with the Sufficiency of Scripture, is the Assistance of the Holy Spirit of God.

And this is to be esteemed and valued above all other Helps and Advantages whatever; because he is the grand Efficient, that quickens and enlivens all other Means; he is an infallible Spirit, the Spirit of all Grace and Truth. Therefore in studying the Scripture, we ought principally to make our Application unto him, and with all Humility keep our Souls in a close dependance upon him.

Men may by the force of Reason perceive the Truth of a Proposition; but they have need of great Impartiality, Faithfulness, and a ready Disposition to receive the Will of God, in order to take in all the sublime Doctrines of the Gospel in their true Sense, and to feel the full force and weight of its Arguments and Persuasions. And this can never be done, but by the Assistance of the blessed Spirit of God. Therefore such a Sufficiency of the Scripture is not here pleaded for, as would in the least render his kind and gentle Operations needless. And when this is granted, and it is also considered, that he is always ready to assist those who humbly and earnestly desire him; and that it is promised, *That whosoever will do the Will of God, shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God*, John vii. 17. when these things are considered, have we not the highest reason to affirm, that the Scripture of itself is sufficient for all the Weakness and Blindness of Men, so as to exclude every thing of the same kind, that has been, or may be put upon a level and joined with it? that nothing else should be a Rule, or of equal Force and Authority with it, or be put to the same Use, as the Scripture is and ought to be; but that all Canons, Articles, Decrees, Confessions, Catechisms, &c. should be subordinate to the Scripture, dependent upon it, and not have the least force, but what is borrowed from it? and in short, that every other thing should be looked upon as voluntary or indifferent, the Scripture only as necessary?

T. And some Proof hereof, one would think, might be taken from the Author of the Scriptures, especially if we consider also, the Persons to whom they are given.

A Work of God surely can't chuse but be perfect, and exactly accommodated to answer its End. All his other Works are universally acknowledged to be so; and why this should fall short, which he himself has magnified in a particular manner, is not easily to be conceived. But it may be accounted for, why Men are not so free and hearty, and unreserved in owning and pleading for the Perfection of the Scriptures. Is there no cause of Suspicion, that this is owing to the Love of Power and Authority? No wonder Men are very desirous and forward to lend their helping Hand in a Matter which will redound to their own Interest and Honour. It has been undoubtedly worldly Ambition more than any thing else, that has put Men upon such dangerous and presumptuous Attempts, as to go about to perfect the Scriptures, to make out its Deficiencies, and to supply that great Good to the Christian Church, by joining something of their own to it, which the Scripture was not able to accomplish of itself; for the natural Result hereof is, that Men transfer to themselves a share of that Authority which belongs only to the Scripture.

But since we all acknowledge the Scripture came from God, who is only wise, and infinitely good, and that he gave us a Revelation with a sincere Desire to make us wise unto Salvation, and has assured us, we shall be judged by that perfect Law of Liberty, and nothing else; can we in the least doubt of the Perfection and Sufficiency thereof? Can it be imagined that God should discover himself, and make known his Will to Men sunk into the grossest Ignorance, and yet not do it to purpose? That he should leave any thing to be supplied by Men overwhelm'd with such Darkness as we are?

2. Let us consider what the Scripture speaks of itself, and we shall find some strong Expressions to this purpose: besides that the Nature of the thing seems to determine, that nothing ought to be joined and put upon a level with it, because every thing else is to be measured by it, and derives all its Excellence and Usefulness merely from its conformity to Scripture. But let us hear how the Apostle teaches us to think of this matter: *From a Child* (says he to Timothy) *thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto Salvation, thro Faith which is in Jesus Christ,* 2 Tim. 3. 15. In which
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Words, the Sufficiency of the Scriptures is positively asserted, and so as to exclude every thing that is judged like Scripture, or agreeable to it. And we may observe, this Sufficiency is ascribed to the *ἱερὰ γράμματα*, which can never be thought to exclude the Words or Letter of Scripture, but to intimate, that the Scripture has this virtue in the Words which God has given it. And it follows; *All Scripture is given by Inspiration of God.* The Phrase here is a little altered, *πᾶσα γραφή*, to signify, that as Men were inspired by God, to express his Mind in proper Words, so this Inspiration did continue with them till they had committed those Words unto writing; and that as it stands now before us in the Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, *It is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good Work.* So that the Scripture lying in its own Words, is sufficient to make Men perfect, and therefore does not require any thing to be added to it; *i. e.* to be set upon a level with it, or to be applied to the same use, or as necessary to make it effectual: for it can be no derogation to Scripture, that other Words and Phrases are made use of to explain and illustrate it, as long as they are made to observe a due Reverence to Scripture, and never suffered to intrude upon its Authority.

And the Apostle, at the close of the Gospels, tells us, they are sufficient to work in us a saving Faith: *These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have Life thro his Name, John 20. 31.* Christ alone had the Words of Eternal Life; and he faithfully and exactly delivered them to his Disciples, as he had heard and received them from the Father: and his Apostles having received a Commission from him, and being conducted by the Spirit of all Truth, have undoubtedly transmitted all those things unto us, which we are concerned to know or do in order to Eternal Life. Where therefore shall we be able to lay any Charge, or to ground the least Suspicion that any thing is wanting to make the Scripture a perfect Rule? *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our Eyes, which we have looked upon, and our Hands have handled of the Words of Life; that which we have seen, declare we unto you, that ye also may have Fellowship with us: and truly our Fellowship*

ship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1. 3. Here we are taught, that the Scripture itself is the foundation of our Fellowship with the Apostles, and that by adhering to this single Rule, we build upon the same Foundation with him, and by this means obtain Fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ. But how can they, who insist upon any other Foundation, be thought to maintain Fellowship with the Apostles? So far at least as Men depart from this Foundation, or stand upon any other, so far they seem to lay and build upon a Foundation of their own, and to fall short of the Fellowship spoken of. The Apostle adds, *Ver. 4. These things write we unto you, that your Joy may be full.* They therefore who closely adhere to the things that are written, have a foundation of perfect Joy.

And, to add but one Text more, which stands at the close of the Scriptures, like a flaming Sword, that turns every way to guard and preserve the Words of Eternal Life: *For I testify unto every Man, that heareth the Words of the Prophecy of this Book, If any Man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the Plagues that are written in this Book; and if any Man shall take from the Words of the Book of this Prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy City, and from the things which are written in this Book: Rev. 22. 18, 19.* Awful Words indeed! But yet by woful Experience the Christian Church has been taught, that Men have found out ways to evade the Terror of them in a great measure. Some Persons, we are told, have been so wicked, as to attempt to corrupt and alter the Sacred Text itself, as *Marcion* and his Followers. Others have thought, that if they did not go so great a length, they were safe enough, and might take the liberty of bringing in and setting up other things as necessary. Thus the Papists have set Oral Tradition upon a level with the Scripture. And it were to be wished, Protestants had never exalted their Articles and Confessions of Faith above what the nature of human things would have permitted. But thus Men have acted; as if this Text had been only designed to guard against inserting Words and Sentences into Scripture which are not there, or blotting them out which are. This undoubtedly is the highest and grossest Presumption, and what may here principally be condemned; but it seems to approach towards it, and

that very nearly, for Persons to exalt and magnify any Set of Words or Articles into the room and place of Scripture; because this can't be done without imputing some Defect to Scripture, which such an Attempt is designed to supply, and which this Text is therefore design'd to guard against. And indeed, it is greatly to be fear'd, that the Guilt of adding to Scripture is in a great measure incurr'd either of these two ways.

(1.) When Persons ascribe those Properties to any Form of Words, which are due to the Scripture only, as Men do when they call any Summary of Religion, drawn up in their own or others Words, *that Form of sound Words*, which the Apostle commands us *to hold fast*: This seems to be making Scripture of it at once. Or when they ascribe to any human Performance, Certainty, Perfection, Authority, or Necessity, which are the incommunicable Properties of Scripture.

(2.) When they apply other Things to that Use, which Scripture is design'd by God, and only able to answer: As when Articles and Creeds are made the Rule of Faith, or the Instrument and Centre of Christian Union; or when they make Canons and Directories the settled unalterable Rule of Christian Worship or Discipline.

From these, with many other Places which might be mention'd, we find the Scripture speaks of it self, and ought therefore to be regarded by us as our only Rule.

3. But if the Scripture is not sufficient, how shall we be able to supply its Defects? The Papists openly refer to Tradition: Protestants are frighted at this, and desire only that a spiritual Guide may be allowed, or that the Authority of the Church may be admitted to have some Weight; and therefore that Articles and Confessions, Homilies and Catechisms, may have a Subsistence in the Church, as well as Scripture. Which Things are in themselves, indeed, not only tolerable, but may be very useful if they are depriv'd of all Authority: Take out that Sting, and they are harmless, and have their Use.

But since no Man, or Body of Men, can claim Authority over others, without proving their Infallibility and Commission to exercise it; so the least Degree of Authority cannot be allowed to any thing that comes from them. The Apostles never pretended to it but upon this Foundation, which they established by a divine Power of working Miracles. But where shall we find that any Church,
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or Bishop, or Priest, have ever done the like since, unless we believe the Papists in those Matters, which a true Protestant would be loth to do in a Thing of so great Importance?

And, in short, should one ever be persuaded to believe the Holy Scriptures defective in any single Point, or not sufficient of themselves to answer any truly Christian End, and at the same time consider the Weakness, the Pride, and Passions of Men; one would be apt to think they ought to remain just as they are, and never be supplied by any thing that is *human*.

IV. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some few Corollaries.

I. Since the Scripture is our only Rule, then all Doctrines, Commandments, and Injunctions, ought to be examined and judged of by the Scripture, and by nothing else.

Men, whose Office it is to teach others, ought willingly to submit every thing they deliver to be examined by this Rule: They ought also to press those who hear them never to admit or receive any thing upon their Word; but first to apply the Scripture to its proper Use, and to receive it just as far as they find it agrees with Scripture, and no further. And Persons who desire to learn, ought to employ the Faculties which God has given them in searching the Scriptures, and comparing all Instruction and Admonition that is offered them with the Scriptures, and nothing else. This was undoubtedly the primitive and apostolick way: How greatly does St. Paul encourage this Practice, when he recommends the *Bereans* to us on this account, and tells us that their Faith was wrought in them by this means? *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all Readiness of Mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those Things, viz. which an Apostle preached unto them, were so: therefore many of them believed,* Acts 17. 11. And whatever our Faith be, if we happen to be in the right, and fall into the Truth without any Sollicitude, or Study, or Pains of our own, such a Faith is not so likely to last, nor to produce those good Works which are the Life of a true and justifying Faith. But tho it be plainly the Duty of every Man to judge for himself, by that Rule which God has given him, yet the contrary Practice has very much

much prevail'd in the World, and has been attended with many mischievous Consequences, which are very flagrant in Popish Countries, and too visible among Protestants. But thanks be to God, this Evil is not yet universal; for if it should, none can tell into what Christianity would in a little time degenerate.

2. Since the Scripture is a sufficient and perfect Rule, hence we may judge Articles, Creeds, and such like Compositions, to be altogether needless.

If we allow any of these to be necessary, we destroy the Sufficiency of the Scripture; for if any thing besides Scripture be necessary, That alone cannot be sufficient. But many Persons ascribe so great Virtue and Usefulness to Articles and Confessions of Faith, that tho they will not directly say they are necessary, yet they think they can't be laid aside without the utmost Detriment to Truth, and that the Scripture will suffer a vast Injury by the want of them.

Others, tho they can't but own the Scriptures to be sufficient, yet think particular Interpretations necessary to convey a right Sense of them; and that without taking the right Sense of them, which is no other than their Interpretation, Persons wrest them to their own Destruction; and unless we understand them as the true Church has always understood them, they will not profit us: And by the true Church, they only mean that Part of Mankind, which have been the Authors and Abettors of those Opinions, which they have the Happiness to fall into.

But nothing of all this can consist with the Sufficiency and Perfection of the Scriptures: For if the Use and Advantage of Scripture depends upon the Interpretations of any Men, so that it can't obtain its End without them, then these Interpretations stand upon a Level with Scripture, are as useful, as important, as necessary as Scripture it self, and therefore can't by any means be separated from Scripture. And the Reason hereof must be, because the Scripture is deficient in respect either of Fulness, or of Clearness. If we charge it upon the former, the Consequence is, that God has made a partial Revelation of his Mind, and left us a Liberty to add unto it, contrary to express words in it: If upon the latter, it comes much to the same; for a Revelation not sufficiently plain can no more answer its End, or be made use of as a Rule, than

than if it was maimed, or wanted any of its Parts, until something is added to it, or altered in it.

Besides, if we must take the Interpretation of the Church for the Meaning of Scripture, then it follows that the Scripture is so far from being a sufficient Rule, that the Judgment of the Church is a Rule superior to it. This also puts an end to the Liberty of private Judgment, and seems to have this great Impiety attending it, That it ascribes that Power and Assistance to the Church, which the Scripture does only ascribe to the infallible Spirit of God.

And since human Articles, &c. are not necessary, it is hard to imagine what should move Men to speak so many good Words concerning them, and to contend so earnestly for them, as has been done: for these have been made the Foundation of all the Persecutions that have ever been committed by Christians against one another; and when they have served such good Purposes, have been used to justify and excuse them all. And if they are really needless Things, it would be a great Happiness to the World, and bring great Credit to the Christian Profession, that they should always be used as needless Things.

3. Since the Scripture is a sufficient and perfect Rule, all Terms of Communion besides the Scripture are sinfully impos'd.

'Tis a common Opinion, indeed, that Christian Societies have the same Power, Rights, and Privileges, as Civil Societies, to make what Laws they judge meet for their Regulation, to admit or reject whom they please as Members thereof. But this Notion seems to be built upon a very wrong Foundation; for Persons may form themselves into Civil Societies by a Right and Power originally inherent in themselves, which God has granted to every Man, with liberty to use it at his own Discretion, for his own Safety, or for any honest Advantage; and therefore every Man, as he sees fit, may join all the Abilities he is possessed of in any kind, to preserve and defend, or enlarge his own and others Rights and Advantages, as far as is consistent with natural Justice: And a Society thus form'd, have an absolute Power within themselves to determine and agree upon any Laws which they judge necessary or useful to the publick Safety, or common Good. And the Wisdom with which God has endued Men, is sufficient to direct them to proper means to obtain all that they

they want, or all that for which they were determined to incorporate and enter into such a Society; and therefore in making Laws, or admitting Members, or any such thing, they need only consult common Prudence.

But a Christian Society is form'd upon quite another Foundation, not upon the Choice and Consent of Men: for tho every Man who enters into a Christian Society ought to do it freely and willingly, otherwise he can't be accounted a sincere and true Member of it; yet it is the Will and Commandment of Christ, the only King and Sovereign of Christians, that does constitute and give Being to it: 'Tis by virtue of this only that they become properly *Christian*; and as soon as they cease to act in his Name, and to be subject to his Authority, they immediately cease to be Christian.

No Man by entering into such a Society parts with any Rights of his own, nor devolves upon another any Power and Authority over him, because he has none of himself.

And as the Original is different, so are the Laws by which it is governed, they being fixed and unalterable, accommodated already to every Case and Necessity; so that no Difficulty or Exigence that may hereafter arise, can justify Persons in making the least Change in them.

The Terms and Conditions required of all are settled, and must remain, as they are deliver'd to us, fixed for ever, being no other than *Faith* and *Repentance*. And whosoever performs these, has a Right to Christian Fellowship and Communion, that neither the Governors of the Church, nor the whole Collective Body of Christians, can by any just Means hinder him of. And this few Persons are afraid to grant, reserving to themselves a Power of explaining Faith and Repentance in their own way. But if the Scripture be our only Rule, there can be but one way of explaining Faith, there can be no other Measure to try it by than the Scripture: He that assents hereunto, must be adjudged to believe, and consequently to have perform'd the Condition of *Faith*: He that owns the whole Scripture, and sincerely endeavours to take it in the true Meaning of it, according to the Advantages and Capacities which God has given him, must, with respect to his Belief, be taken for a Christian; unless Men will call in the Assistance of something else to examine and prove him. But since Christ has left his Disciples nothing else, Persons need not be solicitous about
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any thing further: For what faith the Scripture? *The Word is nigh thee, even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart, that is, the Word of Faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine Heart that God has raised him from the Dead, thou shalt be saved.* Rom. 10. 8, 9. And shall Men pretend to such an Equality with the inspired Writers, as to call the Words they themselves make use of, the *Word of Faith*? If not, how can they insist upon any thing else but that Word of Faith which the Apostles preached? This is the only Foundation that is settled by God, and no Man is or can be obliged to believe any thing but what is proposed to him by God, nor can any thing bear his Authority but his own Word: Whatever, therefore, is enjoined besides his Word, must bear some other Authority.

But since Christians are to be united by Faith, *Eph. 4. 13.* it is impossible to conceive what should or can unite them herein, but the pure Word of God; which is therefore called *the Faith of God's Elect*, Tit. 1. 1. and again, *the common Faith*, v. 4. And so Christians are called *the Household of Faith*, because they entirely agree in the Reason and Foundation of their Faith, and believe the same Things as far as the Variety of Mens Judgments, and their different Capacities and Advantages will permit; and take care never to admit any thing to be the Object of their Faith, but what is revealed by God: for different Interpretations of Scripture ought to be considered as Matters of private Opinion; and since the Scripture never does, we ought never to call and insist upon these as our Faith.

Besides, different Sentiments in Religion can no more be prevented by human Articles and Confessions, should they be generally received and admitted, than by adhering to the Scriptures only; unless we suppose that Men can do their Work more perfectly than God has done his, and express his Mind better than he himself has done. Nay, we find it true in fact, that where these Things have been allowed, Persons have soon found out ways to evade the Sense and Meaning of those who first compiled them; and should the same critical Skill and Subtlety be employed upon them, as has been exercised about the Scripture, one may easily believe the Sense of them would entirely vanish, and be lost. And what wonderful Success has attended these Things? Why, some Persons have shewn a

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profound Reverence to them, and have extolled them to that degree, that the Scripture it self has been undervalued for their sake. And here Persons have settled with the greatest Security, and have been afraid to consult the Scripture, lest they should find any Defect in their Articles, and so appear to be fickle and shaken in their own Minds. And they who have taken the liberty to search the Scriptures, have groaned under the Burden of human Subscriptions, and heartily longed for the glorious Liberty of grounding their Faith upon the pure Word of God only. Others have for Conscience sake refused; and whether these are the only Persons that have broke the Unity of the Faith, is not hard to determine: for in reality these Things are so far from being a proper means to preserve the Unity of the Faith, that they have been the chief Engines to destroy it. These are the Things that have rent and divided the Household of God into so many Sects and Heresies, that have render'd the common Faith private and particular, and have given Life and Nourishment to all Parties and Factions among Christians; nay, have not only broke the Unity of Faith, but of Love too: For by these, Men have been embolden'd to censure and excommunicate one another; nay, have not stuck to kill and slay those who have refused such reasonable Conditions of Peace.

But some will say, How can these Things that are agreeable to Scripture, and contain the Meaning of it, be capable of doing so much harm? Why the mischief is, the more Persons are persuaded that they agree with Scripture, the more Zeal is raised to propagate them, and the greater Indignation against all that refuse them; the more innocent they look, the greater Tenderness do they excite. But yet let Men strive their utmost, different Words will be liable to a different Sense; and Men can't so exactly express the Mind of God, so fully and so clearly both, in their own Words, as he has done it in his: And if they could, some honest Christians would like the Words of God, for his sake, better than theirs. But yet, how is it possible that Men should convey exactly the Sense of the Word of God in the Words of their Wisdom, in long Creeds and Confessions, and especially when they undertake for the most sublime Doctrines of the Gospel? Let us a little consider the Mysteries of the Gospel: Some Sects of Christians very greedily lay claim to them,
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and bear hard upon others as not understanding their Religion, because they don't rightly understand and take in these Mysteries; and by this they are apt to judge that Christianity, or our common Faith, is appropriated unto them; and therefore are unwilling that others should join with them in the Fellowship and Communion of Christians. And the Test they use to discover Persons by, is not the Scripture, but Words and Phrases of their own Invention; and they who can't own and receive them, are look'd upon as *reprobate concerning the Faith*. But how Men should become so well acquainted with the secret Things of God, as to be able to express them better, or as plainly and surely as he has done, and to make Persons sensible that they have done so, while at the same time they own these Things are above their Comprehension, wants to be accounted for; especially when one considers that their Notion of a Mystery is not barely a Thing hard to be understood, or that does not admit of many clear and certain Inferences, or which does not furnish us with Principles and Arguments to prove other Things by, as Things that are plain and certain do: But a Mystery is with them a kind of Paradox, a seeming Contradiction, and yet no Contradiction. However, they are not content to let these Mysteries lie so, as they are proposed to our Faith by God, but venture to strip them of Scripture-Expressions, and clothe them in Words of their own; and then are apt to say they are plain, undeniable, and demonstrable, and so require Persons to receive them as fundamental Articles of Faith.

But it seems repugnant to the Nature of a Christian Society to require any Terms of Communion, but what are supported immediately by the Authority of God, and so come with a common Force and Obligation upon all, as every Word of God does, and nothing else: And therefore to impose any thing human, is to set up an Authority, and pretend an Obligation without sufficient Grounds; and it can hardly be done without exercising Tyranny over the Consciences of Men. Moreover, as far as Men do this, they act like a Human, not a Christian Society, because they don't preserve a due Regard to Christ as their only King, nor to his Will as their only Rule.

4. Since the Scripture is our only Rule, our Zeal therefore should be principally employed about the Scripture,

Zeal is a vehement Affection, that does always much good or much harm where-ever it prevails. It ought to be the product of a cool Head, of sober Judgment, and mature Deliberation; but it too frequently takes its Rise from warm Imaginations and hasty Conclusions. Persons should be fully satisfy'd in their own Minds, and that upon good and solid Grounds, before they make use of it, and even then, never suffer themselves to be led by it, but always keep it under strict Government; for if Persons don't know how to manage it, they may be hurried into great Extravagancies and Absurdities, which they never thought of, and in their heat were incapable of guarding against. And in managing this Passion, we should have a strict regard to the Certainty and Importance of things, and suffer it to rise or fall in exact proportion to these: and whatever Persons are zealous for, if they don't take a right course, and use proper means, they only expose themselves, and betray their Cause.

Now since we acknowledge the Scripture to be a sufficient and perfect Rule, it well deserves our greatest and principal Zeal; because nothing else can be of so great Use and Importance, as that which is the Rule and Measure of all other things. We should endeavour with all our Might to preserve the Standard, that it be never altered nor corrupted any way, and that nothing should be joined with it, that does not come up to the same Certainty and Perfection; and that nothing should be put into its Place, and applied to the same Use that the Scripture only is designed for. This is a matter of the utmost Importance, because all our Principles, and all our Practice too, depend upon it: and 'tis likewise of the greatest Certainty, because we are all satisfied that the Scripture is the only Word of God; and so the Apostle exhorts us, *to contend earnestly for the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, Jude 3. i. e. the Word, or Rule of Faith, which we have in our Bibles; for we know of nothing else that was ever delivered to them. And as other things do more or less tend to explain and illustrate the Scripture, or any way to make it effectual; so they do by their relation to it require a proportionable degree of Zeal to promote them: and in like manner, all those things that do any way hinder the Success of Scripture, or derogate from its Authority, call for a proportionable degree of Zeal and Concern to suppress them.

As the Scripture therefore is our only Rule of Faith; &c. so it ought to be the only Rule of our religious Zeal; for this Passion should always work according to Knowledge; and we are to take all our Instructions from Scripture only. So that if we are zealous for Matters of Faith, or Worship, or Holiness, we should be wholly governed by the Scripture, which teaches us how to form a Judgment of these things, and what stress to lay upon them.

But we ought to consider, that what is delivered to us there in plain and express Words, is undoubtedly true, and acknowledged to be so, by all who own it to be the Word of God. And our concern that it should be accordingly received, and approved by Men, making the best use of their Faculties to understand and act according to it, may justly be reckon'd a Zeal for Truth: but as soon as we go off this Foundation, we come upon a new and different one; the Sense we put upon Scripture, or the Consequences we draw from it, in things that are not plain or self evident, as Matters of the greatest Importance are, being only probable, we can't be sure that these are true, as we are that the very Words of Scripture are so; for instead of the Testimony of God, we now stand upon our own: our Zeal therefore ought to abate, and can only be looked upon as a Concern for probable Evidence to fix and support the Sense of Scripture. And if it be contained within these Bounds, it is undoubtedly very good and commendable; for we ought to use all the Arguments we can to support and propagate what, after a serious Examination, appears to us to be the Mind of God. But if any don't receive it as such, we can't immediately conclude that he is blind; as we may, if any reject the wholesome Words of Scripture.

But some Persons will say, that what appears true to them, they can't chuse but esteem the Truth, and contend for it as Truth; and therefore a Zeal to propagate Articles of Faith, &c. which they believe to be true, is in them a Zeal for Truth. And this seems to be the real Spring of all the Quarrels, and Censures, and Persecutions, which have ever troubled the Christian Church, and therefore deserves to be taken a little notice of.

And without meddling with the Philosophical Notion of Truth, let us consider what the Scripture represents to us under that Notion; where, with respect to our present pur-

purpose, we shall find this word *Truth* is attributed to these following things.

1. Our Blessed Lord and Saviour is, by way of Eminence, called *the Truth*: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*, John 14. 6. And he is so called, without doubt, because he was in the Bosom of the Father, and perfectly acquainted with all the Counsels of God; which, as far as he was commissioned to do, he has revealed to us with the utmost exactness, and without the least possibility of imposing on us: *All things that I have heard of my Father, have I made known unto you*, John 15. 15. And as he is called *the Truth*, so we are accordingly required to believe in him, and may repose our Trust and Confidence in him with the utmost satisfaction, because he is *the Truth*, and cannot deceive us.

2. The Revelation of the Gospel by the Apostles and Evangelists, is also called *the Truth*: *Who will have all Men to be saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*, 1 Tim. 2. 4. and in divers other places. And it is so called, because tho it was delivered to the World by fallible Men, yet being assisted and conducted by the infallible Spirit of God, who fully understood the whole Mind of God, and is a Spirit of Truth, they could not deliver any thing to us besides Truth; and accordingly we are required to believe herein. And that we might be satisfy'd that this is a sure Foundation of our Faith, we are told, that the very Words in which it stands, were indited by this infallible Spirit: *Which things also we speak, not in the Words which Man's Wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*, 1 Cor. 2. 13. And for this reason our Faith should not stand in human Words, which are not a sure Foundation upon which we may safely rely; but if we would believe nothing but Truth, we should ground our Faith only on the Words of the Spirit of Truth, which are the Power of God: and so the Gospel of our Salvation is called *the Word of Truth*, Eph. 1. 13.

3. Besides these things, the plain and undeniable Doctrines and Precepts of the Law of Nature are called *the Truth*: *For the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*, Rom. 1. 18. By the Truth here, is meant that Righteousness which the Law of Nature does teach Men; and because it does so plainly and clearly instruct them in the Knowledge of God, and the

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Duties of Morality, therefore the Scripture does vouchsafe to give the Name of Truth to its Discoveries. As again, *Ver. 25. Who have changed the Truth of God into a Lye*; i. e. the Knowledge of God, which he had impress'd on their Minds, and which did appear with such strong and clear Evidence, that it was worthy to be called *the Truth*.

Hence we may see what it is to be zealous for Truth, and how Persons may unite upon the Foundation of Scripture, without prejudice to the Truth. But if we go beyond these things, and are zealous to enjoin upon others our private Sentiments and Interpretations of Scripture, we have no warrant to call this a Zeal for Truth: Tho if while we maintain the sole Authority of Scripture, we employ our best Abilities in subserviency to it, and use our Reasonings and Deductions as human probable Arguments only, to illustrate and enforce it, leaving others entirely at liberty to judge for themselves of such our Explanations, by the Scripture itself; this is indeed a laudable Zeal, may be of great use to our Fellow-Christians, and will undoubtedly be approved by our blessed Lord and Master.

If we endeavour to assert and maintain the Ground upon which the Scripture stands, to keep it clean and free from all Rubbish, that Persons may see it is Holy Ground, and never admit any human Composure to intrude into the same place; if we sincerely endeavour to shew the Excellence, the Clearness, and Perfection of Scripture, to draw Men to a closer Study and reverend Regard of it; but above all, if we live and walk by this Rule, and our Conversations be such as become the Gospel of Christ, then do we shew a Zeal for Truth which is according to Knowledge: but if we set up our own Interpretations of Scripture, or the Creeds and Confessions of good Men, tho long approved, and call these things *the Truth*, not only insisting upon them our selves, and resolving never to depart from them, but also requiring others to receive them as such; in doing thus, we place Reason upon a level with Revelation, and such a Zeal may be suspected to be nothing better than Bigotry and Enthusiasm.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

P. 4. l. 37. r. *suivante*. P. 8. l. 34. r. *Epistolicale*.

7 JU 66

21 M 17

